



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



U.S. ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES NEW INITIATIVE TO COMBAT VIOLENT CRIME IN KC

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced a new initiative to combat violent crime in Kansas City, Mo., at a joint press conference today with representatives of the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department, Jackson County, Mo., Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

VIPER – Violent Incident Proactive Enterprise Response – is a program designed to proactively combat violent crime in Kansas City by targeting violent drug traffickers and other violent criminals who are identified during the course of homicide investigations.

The goal of the program is to cooperatively look beneath the surface of a homicide in search of related criminal activity surrounding a murder or criminal activity that resulted in a murder. This already is a practice of the Kansas City Police Department but this initiative will focus on additional crimes that can be targeted specifically for federal or state prosecution in aim of taking the next potential shooter off the street.

The U.S. Attorney's Office, working with the Kansas City Police Department, has developed a new set of criteria that will be applied to each homicide investigation which, when utilized, will quickly indicate whether an individual homicide case is part of a larger, more complex ring of illegal activity. If such potential exists, additional resources from federal, state and local agencies will join the investigation at the appropriate time to focus specifically on rooting out that underlying criminal activity. The result will be the development of a "target list" of individuals who may have directly contributed to the homicide or indirectly been involved through separate but related illegal activity. VIPER will largely involve taking the principles of federal prosecution and applying them to the homicide investigations.

"VIPER isn't a new task force," Graves explained, "but an effort to work more effectively alongside the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department's homicide unit. Rather than create another layer of bureaucracy or another line item in the budget, we are taking a common-sense approach to combat crime by improving communication between federal, state and local law enforcement partners. That cooperation will enable us to use existing resources more strategically, to target federal prosecutions where it will make the most impact on crime rates and crime prevention."

Graves explained that the chief of the Narcotics Unit in the U.S. Attorney's Office will meet regularly with Kansas City Police Department homicide investigators to discuss not only specific homicide cases, but any other crimes surrounding those homicides. When it's appropriate, federal charges will be filed against offenders identified by Kansas City Police Department investigators.

"We know that homicides are often underlined by some sort of illegal drug activity," Graves said, "which means that when a murder is committed, there may be related narcotics offenses or firearms violations that could be charged at the federal level. We will work closely with KCPD's homicide investigators to determine whether others are involved, directly or indirectly."

"For example, if a drug dealer is murdered, KCPD's homicide investigators may be able to provide enough information for us to prosecute an entire drug trafficking conspiracy in federal court," Graves added. "Again, the goal is to make the best use of all of the resources that the law enforcement community has at its disposal."

In some cases, federal prosecutors also may be able to use the weight of federal charges as leverage to encourage defendants to cooperate by providing testimony or evidence in a state murder investigation. In other cases, homicide charges may be prosecuted at the federal level.

"In targeting those individuals surrounding a homicide, our goal is that we do in fact take the next shooter off the street," Graves said.

VIPER is a proactive approach that aims to prevent future homicides by arresting and convicting those involved in violent crimes. "If they're behind bars," Graves said, "they won't be out on the street looking for revenge or committing more violent crimes."

In addition to the U.S. Attorney's and Kansas City Police Department's commitment to VIPER, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives also have offered their support to this new initiative. The Jackson County Prosecutor's cooperation will also be a significant asset to the program.

Thanks to Doug Coonrod, a Kansas City area graphic artist, for donating his time and energy in creating the VIPER logo.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow